

NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION
P.L. 106-107: NASA's Report on Implementation 2005

This is NASA's report on the Government-wide "Annual Progress Report on Implementation of Public Law 106-107." This is the fourth annual progress report to Congress, and covers the period of May 2004 through May 2005. This report covers NASA's efforts to streamline and simplify the award and administration of Federal grants and cooperative agreements in the following areas:

- I. Participation in the Government-wide Streamlining and Grants.gov Efforts;
- II. Internal Efforts to Create an Environment Conducive to Grants and Cooperative Agreement Streamlining and Simplification, and Assess Impact of Changes;
- III. Implementing the Changes Affecting the Pre-Award Process; and
- IV. Other Activities.

I. Participation in the Government-wide Streamlining and Grants.gov Efforts

- NASA's Office of Procurement participates in numerous Government-wide Streamlining and Grants.gov efforts, and is active in the Pre-Award, FDP Terms Expansion, and the Training and Certification work groups. In addition, NASA participates in the Integrated Acquisition Environment initiatives designed to complement the Agency's Integrated Enterprise Management (IEM) systems. These IAE initiatives include FedBizOps, Business Partner Network, and the Federal Procurement Data System (FPDS) - Next Generation.
- Being a research agency, NASA has participated in efforts to develop core data elements for the research and related (R & R) data elements. NASA proposed use of the "form-in-form" concept to extend the limitations of PureEdge's forms on the maximum number of Principal Investigator (PI's). This concept has been adopted by the R & R subcommittee.
- NASA participates on the Pre-Award work group which assists OMB in implementing, streamlining, and simplifying its guidance to Federal agencies.
- NASA has provided support to Grants.gov by offering to lead the Grant.gov algorithm subcommittee and has hosted three of its meetings at NASA HQ as well as a special session of the Grants Executive Board on August 25, 2005.
- NASA participates in the Grants Management Line of Business Task Force by serving on the Grants Executive Board.

- NASA is a member and a participant in the Federal Demonstration Partnership (FDP). NASA uses this forum to update recipients on NASA policy and to discuss their concerns. NASA values the feedback it receives from the FDP community and uses this feedback in the formulation of its policies. In response to recipient concerns, NASA has completed several changes to its FDP grant provisions to clarify financial reporting and security requirements, eliminate duplicative reporting requirements, and provide additional information on the internal NASA grant process.

II. Internal Efforts to Create an Environment Conducive to Grants and Cooperative Agreements Streamlining and Simplification, and to Assess Impact of Changes

General Approach

- NASA fosters an environment conducive to grants and cooperative agreements streamlining and simplification. Our award of a contract for NASA's Shared Services Center (NSSC) will consolidate targeted activities, (for example, the processing and management of grants), into a separate NASA Center that reports to Headquarters and is designed to: achieve efficient and effective service; improve data quality; standardize processes; leverage skills and investments; and provide economies of scale. While performance by the NSSC contractor has been delayed by bid protests and by hurricane Katrina (operations are located in Mississippi), work will begin soon.
- The NASA Grants Steering Committee meets every month to discuss NASA grant and cooperative agreement policies. This committee includes various functional disciplines such as general counsel, as well as representatives from all of NASA's major programs. A website is also maintained to keep internal constituencies apprised of our activities.
- NASA conducts outreach to external constituencies such as FDP and National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA) by participating in their programs and updating members at their regular meetings.
- Through its Sponsored Research Business Activities (SRBA), NASA also conducts efforts to review internal policies and assess the potential for additional streamlining consistent with government-wide initiatives.
- A teleconference is held every month with Grant Officers from all NASA Centers to discuss Grant Officer concerns and communicate upcoming changes in grant and cooperative agreement policy.
- NASA updated its "Guidebook for Proposers Responding to a NASA Research Announcement (NRA)" in July 2005. This update reflects all new policies including: Grants.gov FIND, DUNS/CCR requirements, and the standard template.

This comprehensive guidebook was written to assist the grant and cooperative agreement community in: (1) responding to NASA solicitations for research; (2) understanding the NASA award process; and (3) adhering to grant and cooperative agreement administrative requirements. This guidebook is posted on NASA's Research Opportunities webpage and is updated regularly.

- After a major revision and system architecture change, NASA's previous internal grants management system – SYS-EYFUS – was redeveloped as NSPIRES (i.e., NASA Solicitation and Proposal Integrated Review and Evaluation System). As NASA's new grants management system, NSPIRES was engineered to increase the handling of electronic grants information and to facilitate seamless interoperability with Grants.gov. Currently NASA is continuing its system-to-system testing with Grants.gov, and has posted some initial grant applications to the APPLY module. The NSPIRES system has been both tested and praised by members of the FDP. NASA views NSPIRES as a vital element of its strategy for grants and will use it in its system-to-system interface with Grants.gov.
- NASA is developing a contract writing system as part of its existing Integrated Enterprise Management (IEM) Program - Contract Management Module to support the creation, editing, execution, administration, distribution, workload management, and federal data reporting requirements of contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements. This contract writing system will help streamline the process for writing and distributing grants and cooperative agreements and is designed to create greater consistency across the agency. It is anticipated that this contract writing system will become operational during FY2006.

III Implementing the Changes Affecting the Pre-Award Process

A. Grants.gov FIND

- As indicated in our report last year, in October of 2004 NASA began using the Grant.Gov FIND module. NASA issued a directive requiring all announcements of grant and cooperative agreement funding opportunities to be synopsisized using the standard set of data elements prescribed by OMB. Currently 100 percent of all discretionary and competitive funding opportunities, *viz.*, 46 including amendments and modifications, are synopsisized in FedGrants.gov. In addition to issuing a directive, NASA also issued guidance about Grants.gov FIND and provided instructions on how to prepare a synopsis. The SRBA group used its internal channels of communication (Grants Steering Committee, Grant Officer teleconferences, etc.) to show NASA users how to send a synopsis to Grants.gov.

B. Announcement Template

- In January of 2004, NASA issued a Grant Information Circular (GIC) requiring the use of the standard announcement template for announcements of grant and

cooperative agreement funding opportunities; the GIC also provided clarification and additional guidance on the use of the template. As indicated in NASA's last P.L. 106-107 report, the announcement template is posted on NASA's SRBA web page for easy access and was recently promulgated into a NASA Procedural Requirements (NPR) document. [NPRs are NASA's "how to" instructions; they provide required procedures to implement NASA policy.] NPRs are posted on a NASA Headquarters' web site and their use is required across the agency. Because the postings are automated and 100 percent have been synopsisized for over one year, NASA has not trained or communicated further about this requirement.

- The NASA template includes a number of enhancements aimed at assisting the writer of the announcement. For example: standard language was developed on the use of cost sharing requirements; a cross-reference was provided to explain Executive Order 12372; and a Frequently Asked Questions feature was added to explain the use of the template. NASA program managers have reported that the template was easy to use and that they appreciated the use of standard language and cross-references throughout the document. The NASA Office of Education reported that this template was very useful and reflected their unique requirements.

C. Grants.gov APPLY

- Owing to the nature of R&D announcements, agency-specific forms on the Grants.gov APPLY module are required before NASA will be able to fully utilize that function. NASA is also cooperating with Grants.gov R&R 424 Working Group to augment form capabilities (i.e. form-in-form functionality) for use by NASA, National Science Foundation (NSF), and other agencies. Once these forms and data sets are deployed, NASA will be able to fully utilize the APPLY module to post the Agency's funding opportunities to Grants.gov. NASA is also involved in system-to-system testing and data analysis with Grants.gov.
- NASA expects to post 25 percent of its eligible packages to Grants.gov APPLY by September 2005.
- As of September 21, 2005, NASA has posted ten packages on Grants.gov APPLY and has received five applications. .
- In January of 2004, NASA updated its policy on the DUNS and CCR in preparation for NASA integration with Grants.gov. This new policy requires that all announcements for grants and cooperative agreements include a requirement for the applicant to: (1) submit their DUNS number on the Cover Sheet of their proposal; and (2) register in the CCR and obtain a Commercial And Government Entity (CAGE) Code before submitting proposals. [Previously, applicants completed these requirements before award.] This policy permits NASA's NSPIRES system to register users with the data already provided in the CCR database, and helps to expedite the processing of awards. Detailed instructions for obtaining a DUNS number and for registering in the CCR are posted on the SRBA web page and in the

guidebook for NASA Research Announcements. Because these registrations are already required by NASA and will satisfy requirements of Grants.gov APPLY, no additional outreach has been needed.

IV. Other Activities

We are striving to improve the grants process not only for applicants and recipients of NASA grants but also for those of other agencies as well as the agencies themselves. While bid protests and hurricane Katrina have delayed operations by our NSSC contractor, we intend to monitor closely the contractor's success once operations begin. Should it prove successful, we would like to explore the possibility of other agencies, e.g., HHS, NSF, using our contractor to process and manage their grants which might improve operations for those agencies just as Grants.gov has improved operations for NASA.